

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2004

Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Chair Michael K. Young will join Senator Susan M. Collins and Representative Dan Burton at an on-the-record press conference on Capitol Hill on May 13 to announce the decision of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and the House Government Reform Committee to request that the General Accounting office (GAO) undertake a comprehensive review of U.S. oversight of Saudi support for an ideology promoting violence and intolerance globally. In conducting the study, the GAO will seek information from relevant U.S. government agencies and will consult with outside experts on Saudi promotion of religious extremism, including the USCIRF. The findings of the study will be presented in a public report, although some of the information obtained may be classified.

“In May 2003, the USCIRF issued a report on Saudi Arabia with recommendations for U.S. policy. A key recommendation was for Congress to initiate and make public a study on Saudi exportation of intolerance. The proposed GAO study will fulfill that recommendation,” said USCIRF Chair Michael K. Young. “There have been a growing number of reports that funding coming from Saudi Arabia has been used to finance religious schools and other activities that are alleged to support religious intolerance, and in some cases, violence associated with certain Islamic militant and extremist organizations in several parts of the world. These reports raise troubling questions about the Saudi government’s role in propagating worldwide an ideology that is incompatible with both the war against terrorism, as well as internationally recognized guarantees of the right to freedom of religion or belief. What we seek are facts - whether they vindicate or implicate Saudi Arabia.”

At the press conference, the Commission will also publicly release a new country brief, Policy Focus Saudi Arabia, with updated policy recommendations. The Commission is mandated by Congress to monitor religious freedom around the world and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress. Policy Focus is designed to inform the broader policy community about the Commission's recommendations for

U.S. policy.

WHEN: Thursday, May 13, 2004, 11:45 a.m.

WHERE: Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 342

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Dean Michael K. Young
- Felice D. Gaer